

THE PRINCE GEORGE CITIZEN

Para-athlete competes at Otway to prep for Sochi

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Brittany Hudak of Prince Albert, Sask., catches a breather after finishing her spint race at the Haywood Nor-Am Western Canadian cross-country championships at Otway Nordiuc Centre. Hudak is part of Canada's Paralympic team heading to Sochi next month. Photograph by: Citizen staff photo

Brittany Hudak admits she was out of her league racing last weekend in Prince George at the Haywood Nor-Am Western Canadian cross-country championships.

Her open women's category included some of the fastest ski racers in Canada and she finished dead-last in all her races -- exactly what she expected as she makes plans to head to Sochi, Russia for her first Paralympic Games.

"I always find it pretty fun to race able-bodied, you push yourself harder to race people who you know are better than you and have an advantage," said the 20-year-old from Prince Albert, Sask. "There's always more competition in able-bodied and that makes it fun too. I leave on March 1 for Sochi and I thought I'd get in some last races before I go there."

Hudak is part of the 11-athlete Canadian para-nordic team which will compete in cross-country skiing and biathlon at the 10-day Paralympics, March 7-16. Hudak is focusing strictly on cross-country and her first race is on Monday, March 10, a 15-kilometre classic event. She's also entered in the sprint and five km freestyle events later that week.

In December in Camnore, at her first International Paralympic Committee World Cup sprint event, Hudak was the top Canadian in fourth place, which qualified her for Team Canada.

The ski squad includes 10-time Paralympic medalist and 2010 Olympic team member Brian McKeever of Canmore, and eight-time Paralympic medalist Colette Bourgonje of Saskatoon. The coaches are Robin McKeever (Brian's brother) and Kaspar Wirz of Saskatoon.

Hudak was born with her disability. Her left arm stopped developing just above the elbow and she skis with only one pole. She started racing two years ago and has also competed in sit-skiing.

"I'll be racing other arm amputees in the Paralympics," she said. "Some of them might have arms the same length, but are missing fingers."

Hudak is targeting a return to Otway Nordic Centre next year as part of Team Saskatchewan at the Canada Winter Games and she's hoping course conditions will be similar to what she experienced last weekend.

"The course is really fun with lots of variety and I'm quite excited for Canada Winter Games, " she said. "The hills aren't too crazy but there are a lot of ton of turns so it can be technical. On some of the downhill turns you can kind of lose your balance but as long as you know to relax and control it works good."

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